

### **TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY**

One area of the USA received special attention. The Tennessee River valley had a number of problems: erosion, flooding, lack of electric power and extreme poverty. The task of putting things right was too big for a single state to cope with. Roosevelt therefore set up the Tennessee Valley Authority, the TVA, and a number of dams were built on the Tennessee River. These had several effects: they could be used to prevent flooding, lakes formed allowed the river to be used for navigation for 630 miles, and the water could be used to provide hydroelectric power. In 1933, only 3% of farms in the TVA area had electricity. By 1953, 93% of them had it installed. New industries such as aluminium smelting, fertiliser production, paper and flour milling could be started up. The water could also be used to irrigate dry areas. Gradually, new farming methods were introduced to combat erosion. The lakes provided a new holiday area. In this way the TVA improved the lives of millions of people.

### **SOCIAL SECURITY ACT**

In 1935, the Social Security Act was passed. This set up pension schemes for old people, widows and disabled people. An unemployed insurance scheme was also set up, although not all workers were eligible at first. This Act turned out to be one of FDR's most lasting achievements.

### **The New Deal under attack**

By 1935, however, both FDR and the New Deal were running into criticism. For some people, change did not come quickly enough. Huey Long, from Louisiana, wanted to attack the wealthy and to set up a national minimum wage. Father Charles E. Coughlin, a popular radio speaker at first supported the New Deal, then later proposed that America should adopt a form of fascism. He made speeches attacking Jews and trade unions.

Dr Francis Townsend put forward a plan for retirement at 60 to give more job opportunities for young people. He was supported by many.

For other people, change had come too fast: government spending, higher taxes and increased trade union membership were attacked by conservatives. Attack from another direction came from the American Supreme Court. This Court, made up of nine judges, had the right to decide if any new law was in line with the Constitution of the USA or not. In 1935, they declared the NIRA unconstitutional, and all the work under the Act had to stop. This struck at the heart of the New Deal. Roosevelt knew that any more such decisions would wreck it.

None the less, FDR himself was popular. One of the reasons for this was his series of 'Fireside Chats', which he broadcast over the radio. He had the ability to talk to ordinary Americans as if they were alone together. He received more than five thousand letters a day. Here is one of them;